DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 823 CS 211 581

AUTHOR Southard, Sherry
TITLE An Internship in a "Lean" Economy.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Technical Communication Association (31st, Seattle, WA, April 29-May 2, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS English Curriculum; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Program Administration; Student Experience; Student Projects; *Technical Writing
IDENTIFIERS Oklahoma State University; Technical Communication

ABSTRACT

Internships in technical writing offer students an opportunity to apply the principles of technical communication learned in the classroom to on-the-job situations. The internship program at Oklahoma State University gives students practical experience needed to meet the demands of the world outside of academics, even at a time when companies and universities are being forced to cut back because of the economy. During these internships, students do work normally performed by technical writers or editors. Some of the products produced include a training manual for computer programmers, press releases on persons in engineering technology, and a curriculum manual for personnel in child care centers. Although internship directors are supposed to provide work situations in which employers pay the students, it is important that directors not underestimate the ability of students to find paying internships. By searching for and obtaining an internship, the students become involved directly. (A list of internship projects at Oklahoma State University from 1981-1988, and a list of projects completed for technical writing courses at Oklahoma State University from 1983-1988 are appended.) (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED300823

AN INTERNSHIP IN A "LEAN" ECONOMY

Dr. Sherry Southard
Oklahoma State University

An Internship in Technical Writing offers students an opportunity to apply the principles of technical communication learned in the classroom to an on-the-job situation. Currently, the Internship Program at Oklahoma State University [1] gives students the practical, on-the-job experience needed to train them satisfactorily to meet the demands of the world outside of academics, even at a time when companies and universities are being forced to cutback because of the economy.

In this paper, I discuss finding work (an on-the-job experience) suitable for the internship -- with emphasis being on finding such work in a "lean" economy. The work may be projects that students complete for employers or it may involve students working for employers for a period of time such as eight weeks during this summer. In both cases, the students may or may not be paid.

The material that I present is, of course, helpful for anyone directing an internship program or wanting to start one. However, those in business, industry, and government can also use this information, for although they may not be able to employ students, even at minimal wages, they may have projects that such students can complete at little cost to employers.

CS211581

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Sherry Southard

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BACKGROUND

Previously, most of the students in the internship at Oklahoma State University have been undergraduates (usually seniors), and they completed a 3-credit-hour course. Many times, the students were not paid, and their internships involved completing projects for employers, rather than working a specified number of hours as regular employees. The employers have included many university faculty and administrators, but also persons in business, industry, and government in the surrounding community. In January 1984, the Oklahoma State University English Department began offering a Special Masters Option in Technical Writing. Graduate students in that option must complete a 6-credit-hour internship.

Currently, an undergraduate internship consists of a minimal of 120 hours of "work" for 3 credits, while the graduate one is a minimal of 240 hours for 6 credits.

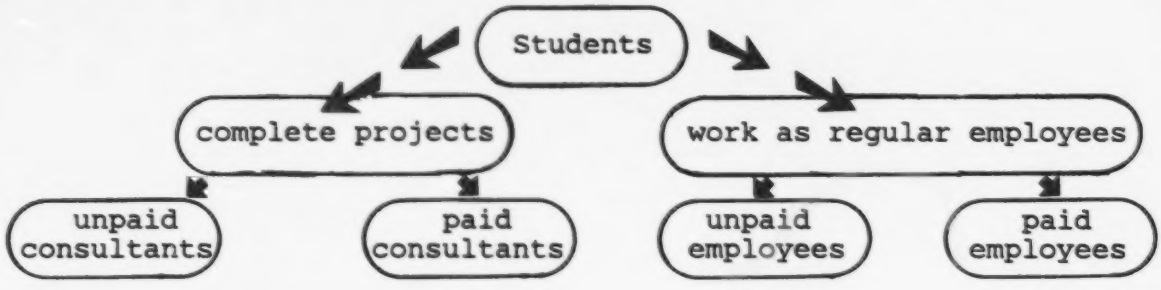
WORK COMPLETED FOR INTERNSHIPS

Appendix 1 summarizes information about internships at Oklahoma State University from 1981 to the present: the employer, student classification, job title, job description/ duties, and employee status and pay. It is the last two items that are of importance for this discussion.

The material in the job description/duties section indicates that the students are doing work normally performed by technical writers/editors. Some of the products produced include a training manual for computer programmers, press releases on

persons in engineering technology, a curriculum manual for personnel in child care centers, and proposals for funding of an attendant care program.

The following chart illustrates the information in the employee status and pay section:



SOURCES OF INTERNSHIPS

Good directors of internships are supposed to provide work situations for their students, especially ones in which the employers pay the students. However, I would like to stress that the director not underestimate the ability of students to find paying internships. Such internships are of more value to students than those provided by the director because for these internships the students go through the job search and they explore possibilities particularly interesting to them and suited to their qualifications. By searching for and obtaining an internship, the students become involved directly. In addition, they often have resources of their own or ones they know of through parents and friends that the internship director does not have.

Although I give the responsibility of finding an internship to the students as much as possible, I continually work to establish internships for my students. If I have employers wanting an intern, then I try to find qualified ones for the employers and don't wait for an appropriate student to show up at my doorstep.

Occasionally, students have completed projects as part of our Advanced Technical Writing or Technical Editing courses. Then the person or company that they did the work for has hired them as an intern. For example, one student, for a project in Advanced Technical Writing, wrote several sections of an employee' manual for a furniture and home decorating center. Later, she completed the manual for her internship as a paid consultant.

Also since a majority of the projects that students complete for these courses involve work for employers who actually exist, many of the projects could serve as internship ones. Sometimes, though, the project might need to be expanded to be adequate for a 3- or 6-credit-hour internship. (See Appendix 2 for a selected list of projects completed for Advanced Technical Writing and Technical Editing at Oklahoma State University.)

SUMMARY

One of the primary disadvantages of students completing projects for an internship, whether or not they are paid, is that they do not have the experience of being regular employees with the typical 8-to-5 work schedule, certain dress standards, etc.

They produce products typically produced by technical writers/editors, but being a part of the academic world, especially as a student, is not the same as being a part of the world outside academics. When internships involving paid work as a regular employee are not available, some of my students are electing to work as regular employees without pay or for very minimal pay. Whatever the actual details of the internships, however, students are gaining the practical, on-the-job experience needed to train them satisfactorily to meet the demands of the technical writer/editor in the world outside of the classroom.

NOTES

1. See "The Internship Program at Oklahoma State University," Proceedings 1983, Council For Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, University of Nebraska, April 1983, pp. 10 - 17. ERIC, ED 241 937, AND ERIC, ED 252 871.

   In this article, I first present the evolution of the course which previously has been a 3-credit-hour one primarily for juniors and seniors with only a few graduate students taking it. Then I discuss various aspects of the course: the internship project selected, the academic work required, employers' evaluations, the hours required, and a description of projects. At the end is a list of both internship forms used and internship projects completed.

APPENDIX 1: Internship Projects at Oklahoma State University (1981 to present).

Employer	Student Classification	Job Title	Job Description/Duties	Employee Status and Pay
Stillwater Pediatrician	Undergraduate	Technical Editor/Writer	Revise Booklet "A Guide to Health Care of Infants and Children."	unpaid consultant
Stillwater Domestic Violence Center	Graduate	Writer/Editor	Write brochure providing information about the Center and the Rape Crisis Team for the community.	unpaid consultant
Parents and Teachers For Young Children	Undergraduate	Technical Writer	Write newsletter, compile resource directory, assist in writing magazine article.	unpaid consultant
Petroleum Technology and Mech. Power	Undergraduate	Technical	Research the program and present the material in brochure for the petroleum industry.	unpaid consultant
English Dept. (OSU)	Undergraduate	Technical Writer	Revise the Department's Course Description Book and write 2 newsletters.	unpaid consultant
Agriculture/ Animal Husbandry (OSU)	Graduate	Technical Writer	Research computer simulation program for breeding cattle and write handout for students and brochure for farmers.	unpaid consultant
State Dept. of Vo-Tech (Stillwater)	Undergraduate and Graduate	Curriculum Proofreader and Editor	Edit and proofread assigned projects. Work with technical writers.	unpaid, half-time employees
Plant Pathology (OSU)	Undergraduate	Technician/ Technical Writer	Revise and edit papers for journal publication.	paid, half-time employee
Halliburton, Duncan, OK	Undergraduate	Computer Programmer/Technical Writer	Revise training manual and other manuals. Prepare evaluation form for training program.	paid, full-time employee

APPENDIX 1 (continued)

Employer	Student Classification	Job Title	Job Description/Duties	Employee Status and Pay
Public Information Office Engineering Technology (OSU)	graduate	Information Editor/Writer	Research and write articles. Edit articles written by engineering technology faculty. Prepare and distribute press releases.	paid, half-time employee
Arts & Sciences College (OSU)	Undergraduates	Assistant Editor (copy & production)	Edit copy for book of papers presented at 1982 Southwest Cultural Heritage Festival (included support graphics). Prepare copy for typesetter & follow it through printing. [also for 1983]	unpaid consultants
Home Economics Extension (OSU)	Undergraduate	Curriculum and Production Editor	Edit extensively curriculum manual for personnel in child care centers. Prepare the material for printers and follow it through printing.	unpaid consultant
English Dept. (OSU) and OSU Foundation	Graduate	Technical Writer and Proposal Writer	Research info. for proposal for MA in technical writing. Write directory & newsletter. Write proposals to fund 20th Century Agriculture Center.	unpaid and paid consultant
VPF (Stillwater)	Graduate	Technical Writer	Write users' manual for computer program for lay audience.	paid consultant
Soc. Dept. (OSU)	Graduate	Technical Writer	Write manual to use in internship.	unpaid consultant
McCollom's Interiors (Stillwater)	Undergraduate	Technical Writer/ Editor	Write organizational/operational manual for furniture & home decorating center.	paid consultant
Minority Programs (OSU)	Undergraduate	Assistant Program Packager	Research funding sources and write proposals for Attendant Care Program.	unpaid consultant

APPENDIX 1 (continued)

Employer	Student Classification	Job Title	Job Description/Duties	Employee Status and Pay
Pol-Air Cond. Corp. (New York)	Graduate	Service Manager	Research & write proposals for job estimates. Supervise jobs.	paid, full-time employee
International Vocational Education Corp.	Graduate	Vice President, Corporate Operations	Direct the research, writing, and production of proposals & textbooks in vocational ed. for internationals	paid, full-time employee
Fire Protection Publications (Stillwater)	Graduate	Technical Editor	Proofread, edit, and write manuals for firefighters.	paid, full-time employee
Systematics (Little Rock, AR)	Graduate	Technical Writer I	Edit and write documentation for banking software.	paid, full-time employee
Speech Pathology (OSU) and English Dept. (OSU)	Graduate	Technical Writer	Write manual for parents of newborns with cleft lip and/or palate. Write manual "Create a Brochure."	unpaid consultant
Publications, Phillips Petroleum (Bartlesville, OK)	Graduate	Supervisor	Direct publication of training modules and user manuals.	paid, full-time employee
FDA Plant Research Facility, Entomology (OSU)	Undergraduate	Technical Writer	Research and write literature review, "The Effects of Various Chemicals & Conditions on Honey Bee Behavior."	unpaid, consultant
Fire Publications (Stillwater)**	Graduate	Technical Writer	Write training manuals for firefighters (involves limited amount of production editing)	paid, full-time employee

APPENDIX 1
(continued)

Employee	Student Classification	Job Title	Job Description/Duties	Employee Status and Pay
Time Management Software (Stillwater)**	Graduate	Technical Writer	Write functional specifications and user manuals for data base software.	paid, half-time employee
Am. Assoc. of Petroleum Geologists (Tulsa, OK)	Graduate	Copy & Production Editor	Co-ordinate preparation of series of articles with line art for reprint.	2 paid, half-time

* Continuing internship with a position available each summer
** Continuing internship with a position available each year (half-time during the academic year and full-time during the summer)

APPENDIX 2: Projects Completed For Technical Writing Courses at Oklahoma State University (1983 to present).

Proposals for	high quality printer for computer center, computer terminal emulation device & manual, feasibility study of energy-efficient model campsites in north-eastern Oklahoma, revision of introductory electronics lab manual, and writing computer manual for REMARC used in OSU library.
Manuals for	computer program for Spanish tutorial computer program for technical writing student census data, pediatrician, users in remote sensing center, flight instructors in aviation education, computer terminal emulation device, introductory electronics lab, employees of McCollom's Interiors, and REMARC used at OSU library.
Other projects	audience analysis of potential students at English Language Institute (Stillwater), seminar in technical writing skills for management at Coca Cola in Houston, PR articles, revision of brochures used by Arkansas Chapter of MS, feasibility & implementation study for converting old house into restaurant, pamphlet for English major, editing of textbook for camp counselors, and brochure on careers in recreation and leisure services.
Brochures (research, writing, paste-up, typesetting, and printing) for	OSU Foundation, Senator Bernice Shedrick (Oklahoma), Headliners (hair salon), Cummins & Petterson Actuarial Consulting in Tulsa, Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation Fellowship, OSU Chapter of Society of Women Engineers, International Cooperative Education Program, First United Methodist Church, speech pathology, A & S Research (Policy Center: Public Policies), Apostolic Faith School, OSU Science Fiction Club, and OSU ROTC recruiting.